

The Ideology of White Supremacy

Author(s): James W. Vander Zanden

Source: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Jun. - Sep., 1959), pp. 385-402

Published by: [University of Pennsylvania Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2708116>

Accessed: 21/06/2014 19:07

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*University of Pennsylvania Press* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of the History of Ideas*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## THE IDEOLOGY OF WHITE SUPREMACY

BY JAMES W. VANDER ZANDEN

It has been now almost a century since Appomattox. Yet in many respects even today the South remains a land set apart from the nation. It has developed a way of life in its essentials common with all America, yet its uniqueness is inescapable. This has been not for want of sharp internal variations and contrasts. Perhaps no American region possesses greater internal diversity than the South in historical background, geography, cultural composition, economic structure, and political and social outlooks. Still, pervading the whole, there has been an inner cohesiveness which has given the Southland its distinctive way of life. And central to this way of life in one way or another has always been the Negro.

On May 17, 1954, a large cornerstone of this Southern way of life was placed in jeopardy. On that date Chief Justice Earl Warren delivered the unanimous opinion of our nation's highest court "that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place."<sup>1</sup> In so doing the Supreme Court raised upon the Southern horizon the prospect of a social revolution with considerable scope. But as the first year following the decision rolled by, and then a second, third and fourth year, it became increasingly unclear as to what the nature or extent of this social revolution would be, or whether, in fact, it might not be largely abortive.

The prospect of major changes in the region's racial patterns was perceived by the great mass of Southern whites as constituting a distinct threat. To this threat they responded by resistance, unleashing a flurry of activity and a surging social movement. More than 90 segregationist organizations mushroomed across the face of the South, such as the Mississippi Association of Citizens Councils claiming 65 chapters and 80,000 members. From Richmond to Austin officials busied themselves with legal alchemy, frantically searching for a magical potion to escape the high court's ruling, enacting in the process more than 196 new segregationist bulwarks. And communities such as Milford, Clinton, Little Rock, and Sturgis captured world headlines as angry mobs milled before desegregating schools intent upon thwarting integration.

Knitting Southern whites together in their adamant hostility toward integration is a group of ideas revolving about the Negro. These ideas give the movement its ideological cohesion—the glue which unites the movement's members in a fellowship of belief. Underpinning the segregationist position are three major ideological premises:

1. Segregation is part of the natural order and as such is eternally fixed.

<sup>1</sup> For the text of the decision see the *New York Times*, May 18, 1954.

2. The Negro is inferior to the white or, at the very least, is "different" from the white.

3. The break-down of segregation in any of its aspects will inevitably lead to racial amalgamation, resulting in a host of disastrous consequences.

From time to time various treatises have appeared subjecting one or more of these beliefs to searching scientific scrutiny. Here we can pause merely to note that regarding such a key tenet as inherent Negro inferiority, contemporary anthropologists and geneticists are agreed that such an assertion has not been scientifically demonstrated while its racist overtones are blatantly false.<sup>2</sup> What is of immediate concern to us is that these Southern beliefs, correct or incorrect as they may be, have a potent, living reality about them. They are alive by virtue of the fact that they are held by men, and by men who act on the basis of them. As an outstanding American sociologist, W. I. Thomas, has noted, "If men define . . . situations as real, they are real in their consequences."<sup>3</sup>

Deeply embedded in Southern thinking is the firm conviction that segregation is inextricably rooted in nature and as such is eternally fixed. In seeking to convey their sentiment regarding segregation, Southerners have frequent recourse to such phrases as "instinctive," "a natural order," and "a universal law of nature." Thus Louisiana State Senator W. M. Rainach, chairman of his state's special legislative segregation committee, declares: "Segregation is a natural order—created by God, in His wisdom, who made black men black and white men white."<sup>4</sup>

And in his concurring opinion upholding the denial of admission of Virgil Hawkins, a Negro, to the all-white University of Florida, Florida Supreme Court Justice Glenn C. Terrell reasoned in a somewhat similar manner.<sup>5</sup> The Citizens Councils have likewise given prominence to this position. A widely circulated pamphlet of the Mississippi Association asserts:

Animals by instinct mate only with their own kind. . . . The fact that man is also a gregarious animal and that human beings everywhere and under all conditions of life tend to segregate themselves into families, tribes, national or racial groups, only goes to prove that all human relations are regulated by this universal law of nature.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In this connection see: M. F. Ashley Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (New York, 1945) and *Statement on Race* (New York, 1951); also, Ruth Benedict, *Race: Science and Politics*, rev. ed. (New York, 1945).

<sup>3</sup> W. I. Thomas, "The Relation of Research to the Social Process," in *Essays on Research in the Social Sciences* (Washington, D. C., 1931), 189.

<sup>4</sup> *Southern School News*, I (Nov. 1954), 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* (Nov. 1955), 4.

<sup>6</sup> "A Christian View on Segregation," pamphlet of the Mississippi Association of Citizens Councils (Greenwood, Miss., n.d.), 5.

This premise is the lineal descendant of the ante-bellum position that slavery was based upon the “laws of nature,” an argument appearing early in the Southern ideological arsenal. In 1700 the first positive statement of the anti-slavery school appeared in Boston, written by Samuel Sewell, then Judge of the Superior Court. His pamphlet, *The Selling of Joseph, A Memorial*, received wide distribution and influenced the progress of the anti-slavery movement throughout the colonies.<sup>7</sup> The following year John Saffin replied to Sewell in a pamphlet entitled, *A Brief and Candid Answer to a Late Printed Sheet, Entitled the Selling of Joseph*.<sup>8</sup> One by one Saffin sought to answer Sewell’s arguments in what was probably the first written defense of slavery in America. Saffin denied the general principle of natural equality as constituting the order of the universe. He suggested that Sewell had inverted “. . . the order that God hath set in the World, who hath ordained different degrees and orders of men, some to be High and Honourable, some to be Low and Despicable; some to be Monarchs, . . . Masters, . . . others to be subjects, and to be Commanded; Servants of sundry sorts and degrees, bound to obey, yea some to be born Slaves, and so to remain during their lives. . . .”<sup>9</sup>

The “natural order” position was a carry-over from the pre-Enlightenment Period. Social and economic inequalities were justified as part of the “natural order” and God’s ordained plan for the world.<sup>10</sup> Human servitude, economic classes, social estates and even the differing status of men and women were explained on this ground. The position had been strongly influenced by Aristotle and other Greek thinkers who had justified slavery in logic as conforming to nature.<sup>11</sup>

The argument was a mainstay in the defense of slavery and became an important bulwark in the philosophic defense that formed to meet the natural rights attack of the Revolutionary period.<sup>12</sup> The anti-slavery school had early advanced the position that slavery was contrary to nature’s law. They frequently appealed to nature as a higher law that overrode all man-made sanctions for slavery.<sup>13</sup> In their thinking they were influenced by John Locke who held there

<sup>7</sup> Reprinted from an original in George H. Moore, *Notes on the History of Slavery in Massachusetts* (New York, 1866), 83–87. Also see William Sumner Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (Chapel Hill, 1935), 4–6.

<sup>8</sup> Reprinted from an original in Moore, *op. cit.*, 251–256. Also see Jenkins, *op. cit.*, 4–6, 39.

<sup>9</sup> Moore, *op. cit.*, 251–2.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, John of Salisbury, *The Statesman’s Book (Polycraticus)*, trans. by John Dickinson (New York, 1927), Book IV, Chaps. I and II and F. Max Mueller, ed., *The Sacred Books of the East: The Laws of Manu* (Oxford, 1886), Vol. 25, Chaps. I, II, III and IV.

<sup>11</sup> See Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. by W. Ellis (New York, 1928), Chap. II, XIII, and *passim*. <sup>12</sup> Jenkins, *op. cit.*, 44–46. <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

could be no slavery under the law of nature; rather, slavery resulted from the withdrawal of the protection of that law. The pro-slavery advocates sought to answer this argument by pointing to the state of inequality that existed in nature.<sup>14</sup> Southerners, such as John C. Calhoun argued that the natural rights position, holding that all men are born free and equal in a state of nature, was contrary to universal observation. Calhoun asserted that instead of being born free and equal in a natural state, man was "born subject, not only to parental authority, but to the laws and institutions of the country where born, and under whose protection they draw their first breath."<sup>15</sup>

Southerners such as George Frederick Holmes, an ante-bellum teacher in several Southern colleges, sought historical support for the natural law position. He argued that as slavery existed "in a very considerable degree under all forms of civilized society, we may consider it a necessary consequence of social organization (or may even go further and with Aristotle regard it as a necessary constituent thereof), and as this is admitted to be natural, so we may consider its consequences to be consonant with the laws of nature."<sup>16</sup> Others sought evidence of an empirical sort from anatomy and ethnology seeking to demonstrate that inequality, not equality, was the natural order of the universe.<sup>17</sup> As the slaveholder viewed nature, variety and inequality characterized every work of the Great Creator; in a word, nature was governed by unerring laws "which command the oak to be stronger than the willow; and the cypress to be taller than the shrub."<sup>18</sup>

Closely allied with the natural order position, was the elaborate Biblical argument formulated in defense of slavery.<sup>19</sup> It was no wonder that in 1863 the Presbyterian Church, South, met in General Synod and passed a resolution declaring slavery to be a divine institution ordained by God. Today segregationists have taken over the ante-bellum scriptural defense of slavery in its virtual entirety, finding in it an ideological bulwark for the segregated order.<sup>20</sup>

The "natural order" argument continued as a major support of the caste-order in the post-bellum period finding frequent expression in the defense of the Southern racial structure. Thus in 1907, Bishop William Montgomery Brown, prominent official in the Protestant Episcopal Church, could write that race prejudice was "a deep-rooted, God-implanted instinct,"<sup>21</sup> and that the "Anglo-American citizen is prevented by a law of nature from allowing the Afro-American to be

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-40.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 200ff.

<sup>20</sup> See "A Christian View on Segregation," *op. cit.*, 8-13.

<sup>21</sup> William M. Brown, *The Crucial Race Question* (Little Rock, 1907), 118.

associated with him in the government of these United States. . . .”<sup>22</sup> Accordingly Bishop Brown reasoned: “From every point of view, the conclusion is unavoidable that it is not only right for Anglo-Americans to recognize the Color-Line in the social, political and religious realms, but more than that it would be a great sin not to do so.”<sup>23</sup>

A corollary of the “natural order” argument holds that “members of each race prefer to associate with other members of their race and . . . they will do so *naturally* unless they are prodded and inflamed and controlled by outside pressures.”<sup>24</sup> Thus U. S. Senator Sam J. Ervin of North Carolina reasons that racial segregation is not the offspring of bigotry or prejudice, but the product of “a basic law of nature—the law that like seeks like . . . man finds his greatest happiness when he is among people of similar cultural, historical and social backgrounds.”<sup>25</sup> Likewise, for the Southern white segregation is not a moral question. Former South Carolina Governor James F. Byrnes declares: “It is useless for me to argue whether the racial instinct [for segregation] is right or wrong—it exists.”<sup>26</sup>

This argument became prevalent following the Civil War as a justification for the establishment of separate facilities for Negroes and whites, including separate churches. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, had made an effort following the war to retain their Negro congregations. When this failed, Atticus Greene Haygood, then president of Emory College in Georgia, and later a Methodist bishop, sought to explain the situation in these terms:

... nature asserts herself. In nearly all of the States the Conferences are now unmixed; in all of them where the negroes are sufficiently numerous to form separate organizations. As oil and water diligently shaken together in a vessel mix for a time, but without chemical union, so these two races mixed in the Conferences for a time. When the mixture settled, lo! the oil and the water touched, but were distinct.

... instinct is supreme; the colored brethren were restless till they had their own Conferences. It was the same instinct, for instinct it is, that led to the formation of a number of African Church organizations in the North long ago. . . .

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 125. Also see Henry W. Grady, “What of the Negro,” in *The Possibilities of the Negro in Symposium* (Atlanta, 1904), 63, and Thomas Nelson Page, *The Negro: The Southerner’s Problem* (New York, 1904), 310.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, 135.

<sup>24</sup> From the report of the North Carolina Advisory Committee on Education (Pearsall Committee). *Southern School News*, II (May 1956), 7. Italics added.

<sup>25</sup> Sam J. Ervin, “The Case of Segregation,” *Look* (Feb. 24, 1956), 134.

<sup>26</sup> James F. Byrnes, “Race Relations Are Worsening,” *U. S. News & World Report* (Feb. 22, 1957), 113.

This instinctive disposition to form Church affiliations on the color basis may be wise or unwise. But it is in them—deep in them. The tendency is strengthening all the time. This instinct will never rest satisfied till it realizes itself in complete separation.<sup>27</sup>

As Guion Griffis Johnson has pointed out, this was a convenient theory as it relieved churchmen of the burden of applying the ethics of the Golden Rule to the Negro. Except for extremists, they did not deny the concept of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, but the theory of race instinct made it possible to hold that the full implications of brotherhood could not apply to the Negro. "If brotherhood *could* not be applied, it was an easy step to the conclusion that brotherhood *should* not be applied. . . . Southern churches, both white and Negro, thus tended to become the most militantly race conscious institutions in the post-war era."<sup>28</sup>

The notion of innate racial inferiority and superiority became a prominent public issue in relatively recent times—probably not earlier than the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>29</sup> Physical differences were known to exist between groups of mankind before this time but the notion of the biological inferiority of particular groups was absent. Thus in the early period of American slavery Negro servitude was justified not on biological grounds but rather on grounds that the Negro was a heathen and a barbarian.<sup>30</sup> When Bishop Berkeley visited the Colonies around 1730 he found the notion prevalent that "being baptized is inconsistent with a state of slavery."<sup>31</sup> This belief among the slaveholders probably constituted the main obstacle to the conversion of the Negroes, as the slaveholders feared that baptism would alter the status of the slave. Jenkins suggests that this idea probably grew out of the old patristic theory which held that slavery was based upon man's original sin rather than upon nature. Thus as long as the slave was a heathen, slavery was lawful, but the sacraments washed away original sin and the basis of slavery

<sup>27</sup> Atticus G. Haygood, *Our Brothers in Black* (Nashville, 1881), 232–235. Also see Atticus G. Haygood, *Pleas for Progress* (Nashville, 1889), 39.

<sup>28</sup> Guion Griffis Johnson, "The Ideology of White Supremacy, 1876–1910," in *Essays in Southern History*, ed. Fletcher Melvin Green (Chapel Hill, 1949), 145.

<sup>29</sup> See Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth*, *op. cit.*, 16; Benedict, *op. cit.*, 3–4; Ralph Linton, *The Study of Man* (New York, 1936), 46; and Oliver Cromwell Cox, *Caste, Class, and Race* (New York, 1948), 322ff.

<sup>30</sup> See Helen Tunnicliff Catterall, *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro* (Washington, 1926), I, 53–71; James Curtis Ballagh, *A History of Slavery in Virginia* (Baltimore, 1902), Chap. II; Edward Raymond Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania, Slavery, Servitude, Freedom, 1639–1861* (Washington, 1911), 17–21; and John H. Russell, *The Free Negro in Virginia* (Baltimore, 1913).

<sup>31</sup> Jenkins, *op. cit.*, 18.

fell.<sup>32</sup> The slaveholders' apprehension apparently was so great, that in 1727 the Bishop of London, who was in charge of missionary work in the Colonies, sent a pastoral letter to slave-masters declaring: <sup>33</sup> ". . . Christianity, and the embracing of the Gospel, does not make the least Alteration in Civil Property, or in any of the Duties which belong to Civil Relations; but in all these Respects, it continues Persons just in the same State as it found them." Likewise a number of Colonies enacted statutes to set at rest the apprehension of the slave-owners so that the work of religious instruction might proceed.

As time progressed and the Negro was converted to Christianity, the heathen or infidel buttress no longer constituted a satisfactory defense of slavery. Gradually, then, the biological argument came into prominence. As Montagu has indicated:

Their [the Negroes'] different physical appearance provided a convenient peg upon which to hang the argument that this represented the external sign of more profound ineradicable mental and moral inferiorities.<sup>34</sup>

The situation was not too different in South Africa. MacCrone states that the earliest practice in South Africa was to free slaves that had been baptized. Such a practice, however, constituted a costly economic burden and challenged the status system. "When, in 1792, the question was explicitly raised by the Church Council of Stellenbosch, whether owners who permitted or encouraged their slaves to be baptized would be obliged to emancipate them, the matter was referred to the Church Council of Capetown for its opinion. That body replied that neither the law of the land nor the law of the church prohibited the retention of baptized persons in slavery, while local custom strongly supported the practice. . . ." <sup>35</sup> Thus the ideological bulwark, originally symbolized by religion, became symbolized by race.

Notions of innate Negro inferiority apparently arose rather early in the Colonies. Overtones of this thinking are found in Saffin's answer to Sewell, and Bishop Berkeley in his visit to the Colonies noted that "an irrational contempt of the blacks, as creatures of another species, who had no right to be instructed or admitted to the sacraments, has proved a main obstacle to the conversion of these poor people."<sup>36</sup> As Jenkins has observed: "The inferiority of the Negro was almost universally accepted in the South by all groups of pro-slavery theorists as a great primary truth."<sup>37</sup>

Some writers such as George S. Sawyer, a prominent member of

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19. <sup>33</sup> Quoted by Jenkins, *ibid.*, 19. <sup>34</sup> Montagu, *op. cit.*, 19.

<sup>35</sup> I. D. MacCrone, *Race Attitudes in South Africa* (New York, 1937), 135.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted by Jenkins, *op. cit.*, 17.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

the Louisiana bar, sought to establish Negro racial inferiority by means of the historical argument:

The social, moral, and political, as well as the physical history of the negro race bears strong testimony against them; it furnishes the most undeniable proof of their mental inferiority. In no age or condition has the real negro shown a capacity to throw off the chains of barbarism and brutality that have long bound down the nations of that race; or to rise above the common cloud of darkness that still broods over them.<sup>38</sup>

Others such as Samuel George Morton and Dr. S. A. Cartwright sought physiological support for the belief.”<sup>39</sup>

In the early 1840's under the impetus of the work of Dr. Josiah Clark Nott, a physician of Mobile, Alabama, the theory of a separate origin of the white and Negro races began to gain currency in the South. According to this view, the two races were endowed with a different original nature. This nature was viewed as permanent, incapable of physical or intellectual alteration. Not only was the barrier between the races insurmountable, but nature was seen as setting limits beyond which the Negro was totally incapable of improvement. Thus, “no philanthropy, no legislation, no missionary labors can change this law: it is written in man's nature by the hand of his Creator.”<sup>40</sup> The principles of pluralism ran counter to the teachings of the Christian churches. Accordingly, pluralism was denounced by church authorities as advocating a theory of natural causation while denying God a place in the universe. Nevertheless, pluralism gained adherents in intellectual and academic circles.

In the decades following the Civil War three major ideological positions can be distinguished on the issue of Negro inferiority. The first group held that the Negro was innately inferior to the white, and that while as a race Negroes might achieve a certain degree of progress, still they could do so only under the pressure and guidance of the whites, although never reaching the white man's intellectual, cultural, moral or physical level. It was the doctrine of permanent Negro inferiority. This position viewed the Negro as essentially a completed product of evolution, incapable of being assimilated by the whites.<sup>41</sup> Enoch Spencer Simmons, a member of the North Carolina bar, articulated this position in these words: “While we give the negro credit for much and believe him capable of more progressive advancement, in the way of learning and civilization, yet we know he is an inferior

<sup>38</sup> Quoted by Jenkins, *op. cit.*, 244-245.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 247ff.

<sup>40</sup> Josiah Clark Nott and George R. Gliddon, *Types of Mankind* (Philadelphia, 1854), 79.

<sup>41</sup> For a foreigner's characterization of the position see W. P. Livingstone, *The Race Conflict* (London, 1911), 14-15.

race, who, under the most favorable conditions, will not and cannot ever achieve what his white friend can, because it is not the purpose of God, the great wise Creator, that he should. . . .”<sup>42</sup>

This group believed that there existed a biological ceiling above which the mind of the Negro could not be improved. The mind of the white, it was alleged, did not attain its full growth until some five to ten years after the full growth of his body, while the mind of the Negro matured several years sooner than his body. Accordingly, there existed an ever-widening gap between Negro and white mental capacity during adolescence and the twenties. E. H. Randle of Virginia typified this point of view: “I would place the matured capacity of the black at about eighteen, and of the white at about thirty. This makes a wide difference in the benefit the two may receive by training.”<sup>43</sup>

Some writers took great pains to demonstrate that the Negro did not have “sufficient and the right kind of brain to enable him as a race to reach that high standard of education, refinement and civilization enjoyed by the white man.”<sup>44</sup> It was alleged that the skull of the Negro was thicker than that of any other race and the gray matter and the number and depth of the convolutions less than that of the white race.<sup>45</sup> Some even suggested that the brain of the Negro in its physical characteristics approached that of the chimpanzee. Several scientists such as Robert B. Bean published findings attempting to show that the skulls of Negroes were smaller than the skulls of white men, and that the brains were less convoluted and otherwise deficient.<sup>46</sup> In this instance, Bean’s work was exposed by Franklin P. Mall who repeated Bean’s measurements on many of the same specimens and found that Bean had completely distorted his measurements and conclusions.<sup>47</sup>

The belief in innate Negro inferiority was widely held throughout the South and frequently set forth by Southern spokesmen and ideologists. Thomas Nelson Page, Southern novelist who romanticized the ante-bellum plantation system, firmly believed in “the absolute and unchangeable superiority of the white race—a superiority . . .

<sup>42</sup> Enoch Spencer Simmons, *A Solution of the Race Problem in the South* (Raleigh, N. C., 1898), 30.

<sup>43</sup> E. H. Randle, *Characteristics of the Southern Negro* (New York, 1910), 60. Also see Simmons, *op. cit.*, 74.

<sup>44</sup> William P. Calhoun, *The Caucasian and The Negro* (Columbia, S. C., 1902), 19.

<sup>45</sup> In this connection see *ibid.*, 20–23.

<sup>46</sup> Robert B. Bean, “Some Racial Peculiarities of the Negro Brain,” *American Journal of Anatomy* (Sept. 1906), 353–432.

<sup>47</sup> Franklin P. Mall, “On Several Anatomical Characteristics of the Human Brain, Said to Vary according to Race and Sex with Especial Reference to the Weight of the Frontal Lobe,” *American Journal of Anatomy* (Feb. 1909), 1–32.

not due to any mere adventitious circumstances, such as superior educational and other advantages during some centuries, but an inherent and essential superiority, based on superior intellect, virtue, and constancy.”<sup>48</sup> He found nothing of value emanating from the mind of the Negro “In art, in mechanical development, in literature, in mental and moral science, in all the range of mental action. . . .”<sup>49</sup> Prominent Southerners such as John Temple Graves and Henry W. Grady likewise adhered to this position.<sup>50</sup> Some carried the position to the point of an unreasoning fear of the Negro which amounted to a phobia. Serious proposals were advanced for removing the Negro from the South and transporting him to Africa or a 49th state. Rabid anti-Negro books and tracts made their appearance such as Charles Carroll’s *The Negro A Beast*.<sup>51</sup>

The second group, while convinced of Negro inferiority, was less certain as to the “permanence” of this inferiority. In appreciating this position, it is important to realize that even as late as the early decades of the twentieth century it was widely believed in scientific circles that culture was a genetically inherited rather than an environmentally transmitted property, a belief now discredited, but still prevalent in popular thinking. Accordingly, the Negro was viewed as retarded, as thousands of years behind the white race in development.<sup>52</sup> However, this second group was not prepared to rule out the possibility of the Negro “catching up” with the “superior race.” Philip Alexander Bruce, with ancestry in the old planter aristocracy of Virginia, clearly set forth this point of view in 1889 in his *The Plantation Negro as a Freeman*:

Whoever seeks to judge the moral character of the negro without having any knowledge of him from personal contact, is very apt to be misled by the notion that he is merely a white man in disposition whom the Creator has endowed with a black skin. Plainly as his complexion distinguishes him from the whites, to the eye, it will be discovered, after association with him for a great length of time, to be one of the smallest points of difference between him and the Anglo-Saxon. Remove all trace of that color with which Nature has painted his rugged countenance, wash away every stain that darkens it, and the moral traits that seem to be peculiar to his race would cause him still to occupy an original and unique position. How far these traits will be modified in the future by the transmitted influences of a more refined and elevated condition remains to be seen. It may be true, as some ethnologists believe, that the highest personal type of civilization is far more a result of inherited instincts and knowledge than of innate superiority of

<sup>48</sup> Page, *op. cit.*, 292–293.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 249–250.

<sup>50</sup> J. T. Graves, “The Problem of the Races,” in *The Possibilities of the Negro in Symposium*, *op. cit.*, 5–34, and Grady, *op. cit.*, 62–3.

<sup>51</sup> Charles Carroll, *The Negro A Beast* (St. Louis, 1900).

<sup>52</sup> Haygood, *Pleas*, *op. cit.*, 6, and Graves, *op. cit.*, 9.

race. . . .<sup>53</sup>

Bruce viewed the Negro as essentially "illiterate, credulous, feeble in judgment, weak in discrimination, a child in his habits of dependence and self-indulgence, accessible to every temptation and with little ability to resist, without a hope or aspiration above his physical pleasures. . . ."<sup>54</sup> He was alarmed that "The influences that are shaping the character of the younger generation [of Negroes] appear to be such as must bring the blacks in time to a state of nature. . . ."<sup>55</sup> It was essentially a paternal point of view, one which held that the Negro race could be elevated only under the guidance and supervision of an advanced civilized race.

A third group rejected the point of view that the Negro was an inferior or sought to skirt the issue as a major consideration. Instead they held that the Negro race was "different" from the white race. The "difference" was essentially one of social heritage, a heritage in which the white had obtained advantages, the Negro disadvantages.<sup>56</sup> As a consequence the races could be distinguished on the basis of traits peculiar to them, e.g., the nature of the moral code and practices generally prevalent among them. This position more or less characterizes the thinking of Edgar Gardner Murphy, an Episcopal clergyman of Montgomery, Alabama, and Bishop Atticus G. Haygood. Haygood writes:

Wherever the negroes are in large numbers, there, we may be sure, are their characteristics. If they live in the midst of another race, there, also, are the characteristics of that race . . . there are differences as well as resemblances —a simple but important fact not always considered. The differences as well as the resemblances go deeper than the skin. Whether the negroes are superior or inferior, whether better or worse than white people, it will nevertheless be admitted by candid persons that a company of negroes . . . are not, in any State, or city, or town, or country hamlet in the United States, realized in the inmost consciousness of men to be just the same as white people.<sup>57</sup>

Of the three positions the first was by far the dominant. In the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the doctrines of innate Negro inferiority gained considerable impetus.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Philip A. Bruce, *The Plantation Negro as a Freeman* (New York, 1889), 139.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>56</sup> This position was probably most clearly set forth by Samuel Creed Cross, *The Negro and the Sunny South* (Martinsburg, W. Va., 1899). In this work, Cross militantly attacks white supremacy and urges that Negroes be accorded the same rights and liberties accorded the whites.

<sup>57</sup> Haygood, *Our Brothers in Black*, *op. cit.*, 19.

<sup>58</sup> This was true of anti-Semitism as well. See George Eaton Simpson and J. Milton Yinger, *Racial and Cultural Minorities* (New York, 1953), 106ff.

Three of the more important factors contributing to this development might be singled out. First, the appearance of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 had an extraordinary influence upon social thought as well as upon the world of science. It laid the foundations for modern biology and demonstrated the effects of selection upon human beings. While Darwin's theory was hotly defended, attacked and modified, race theorists built up their conception of race on its framework. They sought to connect race with the evolution hypothesis and to arrange the races in a hierarchy, from which the thesis followed that the races could not be of equal endowment. In a period increasingly oriented toward scientific thinking, such a position appealed to many as lending "scientific" support for the existing racial structure.

A second factor adding currency to the doctrine of inherent Negro inferiority was the prevalent belief in this period in the preponderance of biological influences on human characteristics and behavior. In psychology and related fields various instinct theories of behavior were widely held. The importance assigned instincts was reflected in McDougall's *Social Psychology*, the most popular text in its field.<sup>59</sup> The importance of learning and culture in the determination of human characteristics and capabilities had been suggested in the early theoretical work of such men as Franz Boas,<sup>60</sup> Charles H. Cooley<sup>61</sup> and George Herbert Mead,<sup>62</sup> but this latter orientation found the going heavy.

Even as late as the 1920's the situation was quite confused. The social sciences were preoccupied with the nature-nurture controversy. But research on race was clearly undermining the theory of innate racial superiority and inferiority, while the various instinct theories were falling into general disrepute. Illustrative was the re-examination of the Army's intelligence testing program during World War I. Originally the finding that Negroes scored lower than whites had been given a racist interpretation by C. C. Brigham.<sup>63</sup> Later analysis, such as O. Klineberg's studies, showed that Negroes in some northern states scored higher than whites in some southern states. Still sociological thinking was confused. Surveying the available evidence

<sup>59</sup> W. McDougall, *An Introduction to Social Psychology* (Boston, 1911).

<sup>60</sup> Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man* (New York, 1911), and "The Mind of Primitive Man," *The Journal of American Folk-Lore*, Vol. 14 (Jan.-March 1911), 1-11.

<sup>61</sup> Charles H. Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York, 1902), and *Social Organization* (New York, 1912).

<sup>62</sup> George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago, 1934). This volume was prepared by Charles W. Morris from students' lecture notes after Mead's death. As a result it constitutes a much earlier contribution than its date of publication.

<sup>63</sup> C. C. Brigham, *A Study of American Intelligence* (Princeton, 1923).

on the issue in 1927, P. A. Sorokin in his *Contemporary Sociological Theories* could write:

. . . [the] perfect agreement of all these tests: the historico-cultural, the mental; the absence of geniuses, especially of the highest rank; and the 'superiority' of the mulattoes, seems to indicate strongly . . . that the cause of such a difference in the negro is due not only, and possibly not so much to environment, as to heredity.<sup>64</sup>

It was little wonder then that such beliefs had wide credence among the general population.

A third factor giving impetus to the doctrine of Negro inferiority was Anglo-Saxonism, a product of modern nationalism and expansionism. For a time it had a particularly powerful grip upon American historians, represented by such men as Herbert Baxter Adams and John Fiske who exalted the rôle of the Anglo-Saxons in history.<sup>65</sup> The Anglo-Saxonist cult was allied with the notion of inevitable Anglo-Saxon "destiny," a notion reflected in the "Manifest Destiny" position. The doctrine found wide acceptance in the South, widely popularized by such Southern spokesmen as Henry W. Grady, who found little difficulty linking Anglo-Saxonism with white supremacy:

The Anglo-Saxon blood has dominated always and everywhere. It fed Alfred when he wrote the charter of English liberty; it gathered about Hampden as he stood beneath the oak; it thundered in Cromwell's veins as he fought his king; it humbled Napoleon at Waterloo; it has touched the desert and jungle with undying glory; it carried the drum-beat of England around the world and spread on every continent the gospel of liberty and of God; it established this republic, carved it from the wilderness, conquered it from the Indians, wrested it from England, and at last, stilling its own tumult, consecrated it forever as the home of the Anglo-Saxon, and the theater of his transcending achievement. *Never one foot of it can be surrendered while that blood lives in American veins, and feeds American hearts, to the domination of an alien and inferior race.*<sup>66</sup>

Today among the great mass of Southern whites the belief in Negro racial inferiority is virtually universal. However, in strictly biological terms the thinking is vague and unclear. An array of traits are attributed "by nature" to the Negro, traits which are believed to be inherent in the "race," and which define the Negro as an "inferior." These alleged traits include unreliability, laziness, thriftlessness, immaturity, immorality, criminal inclination, ignorance, incapacity for sustained mental activity and special susceptibility to certain diseases.

<sup>64</sup> Sorokin, *Contemporary Sociological Theories* (New York, 1928), 297-8.

<sup>65</sup> For an excellent treatment of Anglo-Saxonism see Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, rev. ed. (Boston, 1955), Ch. 9.

<sup>66</sup> Grady, *op. cit.*, 64-5. Italic added.

The belief finds sophisticated formulation among some Southern intellectuals. Representative of such expressions are the following:

History is not so much the record of the events of nations as a whole as it is the chronicle of the contributed civilizations of the superior races. . . . The negro race, though one of the oldest, has never built a worthy civilization.—[President D. M. Nelson of Mississippi College, Clinton, Miss.]<sup>67</sup>

There is much evidence to show that the Caucasoid people, the white race, have creative talents and abilities that have not been demonstrated to any considerable extent by the Negro race. . . . The white and Negro races differ in talents and abilities that are hereditary.—[Dr. W. C. George of the University of North Carolina Medical School.]<sup>68</sup>

The strength of the belief in Negro biological inferiority tends to vary inversely with educational level. In fact, among white Southerners with some college education there is a tendency to supplant the belief in inherent Negro inferiority with a belief that the Negro is merely "different" from whites, leaving the issue of "innateness" either open or denying it entirely. Kenneth Cass, Greenville, South Carolina mayor, expresses this point of view in a remark to a *Life* writer: "I don't want to argue it [that Negroes are inherently inferior] with anybody, but I don't go along with that. It doesn't sound quite Christian to me. They're human beings just like everybody else."<sup>69</sup>

Still white Southerners are in general agreement that Negroes are "different" from whites. Mississippi Senator John C. Stennis sets forth this sentiment to the *U. S. News & World Report*: "The traditions of the races are greatly different. The environment and background of the races are greatly different. Actually there are great social and emotional differences that quickly come to the surface when aroused. Their mental processes are different. . . ."<sup>70</sup> The average white Southerner, when specifying the manner in which Negroes differ from whites, frequently singles out an array of "differences"; these have been summarized by Thomas R. Waring, editor of the Charleston, S. C., *News & Courier*, in a highly publicized article in *Harper's Magazine*.<sup>71</sup> In it Waring attributed to Negroes higher incidences of venereal disease, a lower cultural level, more "casual" marital habits and considerably higher rates of illegitimacy, a greater

<sup>67</sup> D. M. Nelson, *Conflicting Views on Segregation*, pamphlet of the Mississippi Association of Citizens Councils (Greenwood, Miss., n.d.), 10.

<sup>68</sup> From a speech at Dartmouth College in Hanover, N. H., fall of 1956.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Wallace, "The Voices of the White South," *Life* (Sept. 17, 1956), 110.

<sup>70</sup> "The Race Issue: South's Plans, How Negroes Will Meet Them," *U. S. News & World Report* (Nov. 18, 1955), 90.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas R. Waring, "The Southern Case Against Desegregation," *Harper's Magazine* (Jan. 1956), 36-45.

crime rate, and a lower average intellectual development.

Among whites of lower and even some middle socio-economic class stations one elicits highly emotional responses lacking Waring's level of literary sophistication. It should be understood, however, that the white Southerner holding beliefs such as these is not dishonest or engaged in deliberate deceit. His ideas conform to his personal experience and observation, selective as they may be. The Negro's living standards, though rising, are still low; rates of extramarital households and illegitimacy, of tuberculosis and venereal disease, and of crimes against persons and property are considerably higher among Negroes than whites; and results of standardized, national I.Q., achievement, reading and related tests from Virginia to Texas show consistently lower scores for Negro than white children when taken as a racial group. The average Southern white is not aware of the multitude of social and cultural facts and forces which have fostered these situations. Rather he associates them with the visible physical characteristics of the Negro and concludes the Negro is inherently inferior or at the very least "different."

Given these beliefs concerning the Negro, the prospect of school integration evokes widespread fear in the mind of the Southern white. At the same time the beliefs function as an ideological bulwark of the existing caste system. For if the Negro occupies a position in the biological order lower than the white and nearer to the animals, or if his basic personality and behavior pattern is "different" from that of the whites (a pattern which whites commonly define as socially unacceptable or reprehensible), then a segregated order is in no need of moral defense. Accordingly, from the white point of view, the Negro does not enjoy "rights" but merely "privileges." These "privileges" are seen by the white as testifying to his generous, unprejudiced nature and as satisfying the dictates of Christian charity.

Gunnar Myrdal in his monumental study, *An American Dilemma*,<sup>72</sup> postulates the existence of a struggle within the heart of America between its democratic creed of equality and justice and its segregated, castelike system. What Myrdal failed to comprehend is that for most Southern whites there is no such moral dilemma. The doctrine of Negro inferiority or "differences" serves to place the Negro beyond the pale of the American democratic creed. This is illustrated by an experience I had while walking near a Negro section in Augusta, Georgia. As I was passing a number of white children who were hurling stones and insults at a nearby group of Negro children, I inquired of the former: "Why are you throwing stones at those children?" They replied: "Mister, they ain't children, they're niggers!"

<sup>72</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York, 1944).

Closely associated with the doctrine of Negro racial inferiority is the belief that interbreeding or crossing between races results in inferior offspring. According to popular superstition, the offspring of interracial unions inherit all the bad and few of the good qualities of the parental stocks. In turn these bad qualities are allegedly passed on to future generations during which time the good qualities are further sifted out through continued interracial unions. The net result is the mental and physical deterioration of the group.<sup>73</sup>

Articulate current expression of this belief is represented in the following statements:

We publish to the world that we protest the attempts being made to desegregate the races, because we believe such would inevitably lead into a hybrid monstrosity that would defy the word and will of God.—[Resolution of the Missionary Baptist Association of Texas composed of some 300 East Texas churches.]<sup>74</sup>

... history shows that nations composed of a mongrel race lose their strength and become weak, lazy and indifferent. They become easy preys to outside nations.—[Georgia Senator Herman Talmadge.]<sup>75</sup>

... the intermingling of breeding stock results invariably in the production of "scrubs" or mongrel types, and the downgrading of the whole herd. The same principle applies with equal force to the process of human development.—[A Citizens Council pamphlet.]<sup>76</sup>

Southern thought on racial amalgamation can be traced to the ante-bellum period. A number of prominent Southern ante-bellum scholars, most noted of which was Dr. Josiah Clark Nott,<sup>77</sup> advanced the theory that the races were not intended to mix. Nott argued that the offspring of whites and Negroes would speedily merge into one or the other of the original types, or become extinct from defective organization. According to Nott, "the superior races ought to be kept free from all adulterations, otherwise the world will retrograde, instead of advancing, in civilization."<sup>78</sup>

After the Civil War the belief was invested with new, highly accentuated emotional qualities as it became linked with the cult of white womanhood—the "woman on the pedestal" pattern.<sup>79</sup> The

<sup>73</sup> See Brown, *op. cit.*, 106–109; Randle, *op. cit.*, 117–118; and *The Possibilities of the Negro in Symposium*, *op. cit.*, 123. This position is similar to that set forth by Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, trans. by Adrian Collins (New York, 1915), 209.

<sup>74</sup> *Southern School News*, I (Dec. 1954), 15.

<sup>75</sup> H. E. Talmadge, *You and Segregation* (Birmingham, 1955), 44–45.

<sup>76</sup> "A Christian View on Segregation," *op. cit.*, 6.

<sup>77</sup> Nott and Gliddon, *op. cit.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

<sup>79</sup> "The white women of the South are pure. They are a high-minded, proud, spotless race. If they were not this, the Anglo-Saxon people in America would

Negro male was depicted as ruled by an inordinate sexual craving for white women, making all Negro men potential rapists. Through the years it has fostered a deep-seated anxiety among whites for the safety of their women.<sup>80</sup> This fear has been played upon by white supremacist leaders in the current controversy who have exhorted whites that the ultimate goal of the N.A.A.C.P. "is to open the bedroom doors of our white women to the Negro man."<sup>81</sup>

By the turn of the twentieth century the miscegenation doctrine had been elevated to a cardinal position in the Southern ideological structure. In 1904 Edgar Gardner Murphy could write: "The doctrine of race integrity, the rejection of the policy of racial fusion, is, perhaps the fundamental dogma of Southern life."<sup>82</sup> And in 1910 Sutton E. Griggs wrote: ". . . the problem of keeping Negro blood out of the veins of the white race is the paramount problem with the Southern white man, and to it all other questions, whether economic, political or social are made to yield."<sup>83</sup>

For the Southern white the prospect of racial intermarriage or amalgamation is viewed with considerable alarm. It appears to him as a real, imminent prospect—the epitome of evil and danger. For him it is a taboo—the taboo of taboos. Throughout the world societies have erected about sex their most heavily-charged emotional and coercive sanctions. This the South has done with interracial marriage. And as is true of taboos in general, the South has invested this taboo with mystical properties. Viewed as inextricably bound with obedience to it, is the fate of humanity and society. To violate the taboo is to desecrate the sacred (Southern white womanhood)

---

rapidly degenerate into a low-grade, mongrel breed, and that would be the end of American civilization, and the beginning of barbarism." Brown, *op. cit.*, 106. Regarding white women who had sexual relations with Negro men, Bruce writes: "The few white women who have given birth to mulattoes have always been regarded as monsters; and without exception, they have belonged to the most impoverished and degraded caste of whites, by whom they are scrupulously avoided as creatures who have sunk to the level of the beasts of the field." Bruce, *op. cit.*, 55. On the same matter Simmons writes: "Over the few marriages between white women and Negro men, which occasionally occur in the North, we draw the mantle of charity, and attribute such folly in white women to mental derangement and temporary insanity. No self-respecting white woman, in the full possession of her senses, North or South, would ever be so lost to shame and love of race pride as to unite herself in marriage with a negro, to become the mother of a hybrid mulatto race. God forbids such a union." Simmons, *op. cit.*, 30.

<sup>80</sup> See Bruce, *op. cit.*, 83-85.

<sup>81</sup> A statement by Alabama State Senator Walter C. Givhan, a frequent speaker at Council meetings. *Southern School News*, I (Jan. 1955), 3.

<sup>82</sup> Edgar Gardner Murphy, *Problems of the Present South* (New York, 1904), 34.

<sup>83</sup> Sutton E. Griggs, *Wisdom's Call* (Nashville, Tenn., 1911), 113.

and to unleash inevitable tribulation. As the Southerner views inter-racial marriage, it is something which cannot be grasped by secular or rational understanding. In this sense the belief is actually magical in character.

The taboo on intermarriage is focused upon the white woman. It covers not alone formal marriage but illicit sexual intercourse with Negro men. But the taboo does not operate with the same intensity to bar illicit intercourse between white men and Negro women. In the latter situation the white blood is "saved" from "pollution" by Negro blood, since paternity does not establish parentage with the certainty of maternity, and the offspring, regardless of the lightness of complexion, is automatically assigned to the Negro group. In short, a white woman has from an interracial union a "Negro" child but a Negro woman from an interracial union never has a "white" child.

It is this doctrine on interracial marriage that in the last analysis constitutes the South's main defense of the segregated system. Firmly embedded in Southern white thinking is the belief that the breakdown of segregation in any of its aspects would lead to the cultivation of such attitudes and social intimacies as would inevitably result in intermarriage. As the white Southerner perceives the segregation issue, *the question remains: "Would you want your sister or daughter to marry a Negro?"*

For many in America the Southern beliefs outlined here are offensive, evoking strong emotional reaction. But this merely underlines the fact that the contest between the forces of integration and segregation is to a considerable measure a conflict of ideologies. The current school-desegregation controversy has served not only to magnify the differences in ideology within America, especially between sections, but to buttress, intensify and solidify them through the heightened consciousness engendered by the resulting struggle.

In the years since World War II the movement within American life to realize for Negroes the full benefits deriving from the American democratic creed has gained increasing momentum. But as has been true throughout history, movements of social reform have encountered opposition and resistance. Movement has begot counter-movement; ideas have begot counter-ideas. Thus William Sumner Jenkins in his *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* observes of the ante-bellum slavery controversies, "Slavery had defenders whenever defenders were needed; the exact nature of the defense was determined to a great extent by the degree to which and by the way in which the welfare of slavery was endangered."<sup>84</sup> Today the story is being repeated with the lineal descendant of slavery: segregated institutions.

Duke University.

<sup>84</sup> Jenkins, *op. cit.*, 49.